

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO *PENDANT* BELLINI

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*(Dedicated to Jole de Sanna)*

*Giorgio de Chirico pendant la guerre* is the title of an unpublished work<sup>1</sup> by de Chirico, written during the artist's stay in Florence with the renowned Bellini family of antique dealers, and signed "Luigi Bellini". Here, we deal with de Chirico's third Florentine period, which followed the first one that was connected with his move from Greece and the second one, of the 1920s, by analysing the relationship between de Chirico and Luigi Bellini from the 1930s to the death of the Florentine antique dealer in 1957. The finding of unpublished documents (a self-introduction, various letters in addition to the French text mentioned above; drawings, paintings and sculptures) in the house of Luigi's son, Mario Bellini, has helped us to reconstruct several events in the artist's life and several of his works from the period of the racial laws to the years following World War II.

From conversations with Mario, we realise the profound bonds that existed between these two men. Having just turned nineteen, Mario Bellini met de Chirico in Paris around 1931-32. He had, in fact, been sent there by his father, aged sixteen, to study art at the Sorbonne. According to the laws of the time, his father was not able to send him more than two thousand five hundred Lire a month, and so Mario – on payment – participated in auctions in order to promote the local antique dealers. In his memoirs, de Chirico himself spoke of the famous trick of the fraudulent auction sales at the Hotel Drouot... "on the day of the auction, the same dealer then sent several trusted men who made the price of the painting rise and, obviously, sacrificed a certain sum in order to pay the commissions to the auction house. Thus, the painting appeared to have been sold at a very high price, while instead it had not been sold for any price whatsoever"<sup>2</sup>.

When Mario met him in Paris, de Chirico was in such economic difficulties that he had to abandon his studio, which was sealed off. The artist could not pay the rent, and asked Mario to take him by car to the studio, to recover (through a window that had been left open) paintings of his that had been left there. And thus the artist depended on Bellini, who was nineteen years old at the time, also for his daily survival. Of that time Mario very well remembers de Chirico's mother whom, in his youthful imagination, he recalled as a "very intelligent gypsy who adored

<sup>1</sup> *Giorgio de Chirico pendant la guerre*: see the transcribed text of *Unpublished writings by Giorgio de Chirico*, pp. 438-440.

<sup>2</sup> G. de Chirico, *Memorie della mia vita*, Bompiani, Milan, 2002, p. 142.

her two children and was the family's real genius".

The meeting with Luigi Bellini and his wife Nini also dates to those years. The Bellini couple had gone to Paris to visit their son, and met de Chirico at Mario's house in Rue Copernique. The painting (fig. 1) depicting *Luigi e Nini Bellini*<sup>3</sup> was painted in that tiny house, which was actually located over the water deposits for the city's fountains. A copy of a photograph exists (fig. 2) that shows de Chirico, then in his forties, almost squashed due to the lack of space, in front of the double portrait. In the painting, the antique dealer is depicted holding a small sculpture in his hands: his attentive gaze seems almost "greedy" to possess the small object, on which he appears to project the great interest in sculpture that, a short time later, was to bring the antique dealer and the artist together. This work seems to signal the beginning of the collaboration between the antique dealer and the artist, who introduced himself as a sculptor. The small sculpture – like a curly-headed Greek god – may have been one of the artist's very first experiences with this medium, as suggested by Jole de Sanna. In fact, if compared it with the immediately successive lithographs of 1934 for Jean Cocteau's *Mythologie*, the small sculpture brings to mind the walking "solitary bather" seen from behind, between the parquet-waves of the *Bagni misteriosi* (Mysterious Baths), but also refers to the sculptures executed immediately afterwards, as well as to the curly head of the child in *Cavallo e palafreniere* (Horse and groom) (fig. 3).

In 1932 de Chirico and his companion Isabella left Paris to move to Florence, where they stayed at the Bellini's house. The *Portrait of Nini* (fig. 4)<sup>4</sup> belongs to those times: it was painted over three long months in the apartment located on the third floor above the gallery on Lungarno Soderini, at number 5. This apartment was placed at de Chirico's disposal by Bellini (who some years later also offered him the use of an apartment that he owned in Via della Spada). That same year, Luigi organised a one-man exhibition for the artist at his other gallery in Palazzo Ferroni in Via Tornabuoni. On that occasion, the Superintendent Ferdinando Poggi, at Giorgio Castelfranco's suggestion, purchased the painting *Natura morta con uva e peperoni rossi* (Still Life with Grapes and Sweet Red Peppers) for the Gallery of Modern Art in Florence<sup>5</sup>. Records conserved at this Gallery also show that the painting *Canzone meridionale* (Song of the South) was bought at Palazzo Ferroni in 1932<sup>6</sup>. The exhibitions at Palazzo Ferroni organised by Luigi Bellini were particularly important for launching Italian

<sup>3</sup> The painting was recently displayed for the first time at the exhibition *Il grande metafisico. Giorgio de Chirico scultore*, Cremona, Palazzo Trecchi, March-May 2004, Mondadori Electa, Milan, 2004. See, in particular, G. Rasario, *Le sculture di Giorgio de Chirico nella collezione Bellini di Firenze*, p. 56 and pp. 78-79.

<sup>4</sup> The portrait is well-known, and has been published several times. For a colour reproduction, see the catalogue of the Giorgio de Chirico *Pictor Optimus* exhibition, Rome, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 16<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1992 - 8<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1993, curated by M. Calvesi, F. Benzi, M.G. Tolomeo Speranza, and *Carte Segrete*, Rome, 1992, p. 176. It deals with an oil on canvas, 79 x 66 cm, published for the first time in the «Gazzetta artistica» of 1932.

<sup>5</sup> In the «Fiera Letteraria», year XLIII n. 17, 25<sup>th</sup> April 1968. Giorgio Castelfranco, in the article *Sono un prigioniero* by Luciano Doddoli, recalls that he was the one to suggest to Superintendent Poggi to acquire the painting. See also the recent catalogue *Pittori del Maggio Musicale nelle gallerie fiorentine da Giorgio de Chirico a Corrado Cagli*, edited by M. Bucci, A. Natali, A. M. Petrioli Tofani, C. Sisi; 9<sup>th</sup> April - 31<sup>st</sup> May 2003, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, 2003, pp. 36-38.

<sup>6</sup> The paintings by Giorgio de Chirico in the Gallery of Modern Art in Florence are: 1) G. de Chirico, *Natura morta con peperoni rossi* (Still Life with Sweet Red Peppers), oil on canvas, 60 x 79 cm, coll: record n.° 6, G.A.M. Florence. acq./1932, Palazzo Ferroni. 2) G. de Chirico, *Composizione metafisica* (Metaphysical Composition), oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm, coll: record n.° 1925, G.A.M. Florence, gift of Ambron, 1964. 3) G. de Chirico, *Canzone meridionale* (Song of the South), oil on canvas, 76 x 60 cm, journals coll. n.° 463, G.A.M. Florence, acq./1932, Palazzo Ferroni. 4) G. de Chirico, *Natura morta con mele* (Still Life with Apples), oil on canvas applied to cardboard, 46 x 55 cm, journals coll. n.° 424, G.A.M. Florence, acq./1940, acq. from the Ministry of National Education. In the «La Nazione» art room, on the back of the price-label: «Galleria Il Milione 1940».

artists such as Primo Conti, Arturo Martini, Filippo de Pisis, and Mario Sironi<sup>7</sup>. Bellini also arranged for de Chirico to work on the costumes and set designs for the production of Vincenzo Bellini's opera *I Puritani* in 1933, for the first edition of the Florence May Festival. At Mario Bellini's house is a portrait, unpublished until now, of his wife *Dodina* (fig. 5), in which the young wife is depicted all dressed up and with a diamond clip in her hair. As Mario recalls, this was indeed a memento of the evening of the *première*: the painting was executed on their return from the performance, which had been booed due to de Chirico's modern stage sets. The scenery and costumes were defended by Luigi Bellini, as the critiques of the time reported, and the importance of the innovation was fully understood by Giorgio Castelfranco who, in «Il Bargello», wrote, among other things, "...several scenic visions...will remain in the memory of many Florentines when not even the slightest echo of the controversies between and against de Chirico still exist..."<sup>8</sup>. De Chirico's second one-man show in Florence was of this same period<sup>9</sup>. The choice, again that of Palazzo Ferroni, "since that gallery belonged to my good friend, the antique dealer Luigi Bellini, whose guest I also was", was – according to the artist – the cause of the disputes during the musical performance<sup>10</sup>. The following year, de Chirico was in Paris, in a new and less costly studio, at number 9, rue Brown Séquard<sup>11</sup>. He returned to Tuscany in August 1935.

1936 was the year that he travelled and put on exhibitions in the United States of America. He arrived in New York on 27 August 1936, and participated in "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In Italy Scheiwiller published the monograph on his work by Giuseppe Lo Duca<sup>12</sup>. For de Chirico, the journey to America was "one of the worst recollections of my life", and the consideration of having come "there for my work, for my paintings" – as he wrote in his memoirs<sup>13</sup> – was the fruit of consolation, together with the thought of what the return would be "once

<sup>7</sup> The Mario Sironi exhibition was personally organised by Mario Bellini at the gallery premises of Palazzo Corsini on Via Il Prato in Florence, under the patronage of the President of the Republic. There were three Bellini galleries in Florence at that time: the one at Lungarno Soderini 5, above the house; the one at Palazzo Ferroni on Via Tornabuoni 4, and the gallery at Palazzo Corsini on Via Il Prato. The exhibition committee of Palazzo Ferroni consisted of Gianfranco Contini, Piero Bargellini, Giovanni Papini, and Luigi Papi. Luigi Bellini also organised the exhibition of the *One Hundred Futurists*, which was inaugurated by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti.

<sup>8</sup> G. Castelfranco, *La scenografia moderna al Maggio Musicale. Persistere*, in «Il Bargello», 4<sup>th</sup> June 1933. Archives of Contemporary Artists, Florence, Kunsthistorisches Institut. In the same article with the sub-title *Il Bilancione*, Gioacchino Contri outlines the controversy over *I Puritani*, making reference both to the article by Giorgio Castelfranco and to the one by Alberto Luchini published in «Il Bargello» of the previous week. In the same Kunsthistorisches Institut archives, the file on Giorgio de Chirico contains numerous articles regarding the performance of *I Puritani* and the Florentine public's contestation over the stage sets, reported in articles that announce the coming second Florentine performance. See in particular: "That *first time* with de Chirico, the historical edition of 1933 returns with a formidable cast in «La Nazione» of 25<sup>th</sup> May 1989.

<sup>9</sup> See M. Fagiolo dell'Arco (ed.), *Giorgio de Chirico. Gli Anni Trenta*, Lo Scudo Gallery, Museum of Castelvecchio, Verona, 13<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1998 - 28<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1999, Verona 1998, p. 295. Fagiolo quotes the list of works and critiques of the epoch for the first exhibition, which was inaugurated on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1932 at Palazzo Ferroni. The period of the second exhibition at Palazzo Ferroni can be deduced from an announcement published in «Il Bargello» of 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1933, which reads: "GIORGIO DE CHIRICO is exhibiting landscapes, figures, still-lives, and stage-set designs at the Bellini Gallery of Palazzo Ferroni (Via Tornabuoni 4). Extremely interesting and characteristic production of one of the most well-known and controversial contemporary Italian artists".

<sup>10</sup> In *Memorie della mia vita*, op. cit. p. 154, he wrote: "During this period of the Maggio Musicale [May Music Festival] I wanted to have an exhibition in Florence of my most recent works. The director of the newspaper LA NAZIONE had a room then on the newspaper's premises which was dedicated to exhibitions of paintings, and he suggested that I have the exhibition in his room. However, I preferred to exhibit at Palazzo Ferroni, since that gallery belonged to my good friend, the antique dealer Luigi Bellini, whose guest I still was. To take revenge for the fact that I had not exhibited in his newspaper's room, the director gave orders because during the performance, my stage sets and costumes were to be booed and hissed at and subsequently ridiculed and disgraced in the newspaper at the hands of the official critic".

<sup>11</sup> M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Cronologia ragionata 1929-1940*, in *De Chirico. Gli Anni Trenta*, op. cit., 1998, p. 267. The studio was located at number 9 of rue Brown Séquard, beyond the Gare de Montparnasse.

<sup>12</sup> G. Lo Duca, *Giorgio de Chirico*, Hoepli, Milan 1936, with a bibliographical note by G. Scheiwiller; second edition G. Lo Duca, Hoepli, Milan 1945.

<sup>13</sup> See G. de Chirico, *Memorie della mia vita*, op. cit., pp. 157-158, and G. de Chirico, *Il meccanicismo del pensiero*, ed. by M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, Einaudi, Turin, 1985; in particular, pages 346-248, written by the artist in Paris on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1938, upon his return from America.

<sup>14</sup> G. de Chirico, *Memorie*, op. cit., p. 158.

again in that old, tormented, ramshackle but, all things considered, likeable Europe”<sup>14</sup>.

Instead, his return to Italy was to be tinged with bitterness, since de Chirico realised that from Milan, the Il Milione Gallery, managed by the Ghiringhelli brothers, “had initiated a widespread boycott against my painting, by trying to distract the attention of collectors and of the public in general from what I was then doing; by insisting on metaphysical and also non-metaphysical painting, provided that it was not what I was doing then and as long as they were not paintings belonging to me”<sup>15</sup>. As a reaction to the “despicable and malicious campaign provoked by the Il Milione Gallery”, de Chirico decided to exhibit his most recent works for the inauguration of Vittorio Barbaroux’s Gallery in Milan, in Via Santo Spirito in March 1938. In the Lombard city the artist, who lived in Via Gesù, realised that the campaign led by the Il Milione Gallery had produced its results: “for the people influenced by this campaign, the painting had to be older than was possible”<sup>16</sup>. Nevertheless, the artist was to sell a good part of his recent works<sup>17</sup>, while on the Milanese market people began to buy<sup>18</sup> his works from the Broglio and Castelfranco collections at the Barbaroux and Il Milione galleries, which between 1939 and 1941 were to be the protagonists of the sale of the Castelfranco collection<sup>19</sup>.

The bringing in of the racial laws of September 1938 disgusted de Chirico, who returned to Paris in 1939 with Isabella, a Polish Jewess who had become his companion following his definitive separation from his wife, Raissa. In his autobiography *Memorie della mia vita*, the artist speaks of Italy as being a country in which “every sentiment of humanity, dignity and modesty was banished”<sup>20</sup>, and life for him became very unsettled. In 1940 Paris was invaded by the Nazis, and de Chirico returned to Italy where he lived between Milan and Florence. Once again it was Luigi Bellini who helped him, by hosting him several times during the summer months at his villa in Impruneta, together with the baritone Titta Ruffo. During the war years, the villa was a valid refuge for everyone, even if the guests demonstrated their impudence by showing themselves in the town and, for this reason, were reproached by the master of the house. De Chirico did numerous paintings at the Impruneta villa. A personal recollection of these, conserved affectionately by Mario Bellini in his dining room, is a small unpublished painting (fig. 6) depicting the garden of the villa. The oil on canvas, which is signed, has a British red priming, is signed and presents the motif of the woods and large trees typical of de Chirico’s “Octobers”. It is small, but extremely precious, thanks to the renewed pictorial quality with which the artist rendered the profound shadows of the trees and the contrasting lights in the sky in a magical atmosphere. The numerous paintings and drawings by de Chirico with the image of *Dioscuro e il cavallo* (Dioscuro and horse) (figs. 7 and 8) date to the Florentine years and to stays between 1936 and 1940. It was indeed Mario, in whose face still today can be detected the strong and marked features of a young Dioscuro, who posed for de Chirico for numerous drawings and

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 166. In fact, the artist wrote, “They tried to put a spoke in my wheel and to cut the grass from under my feet. ... The Ghiringhelli brothers went to a lot of trouble to persuade the Milanese that the works which they had were the best that I had ever painted.”

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 167: “...for the people influenced by this campaign, the picture had to be older than was possible”.

<sup>17</sup> *De Chirico. Gli anni Trenta*, ed. by M. Fagiolo dell’Arco, op. cit., p. 280.

<sup>18</sup> Jole de Sanna (ed.), *Biography of de Chirico* in G. de Chirico, I. Far, *Commedia dell’arte moderna*, artists’ writings number 22, Abscondita, Milan 2002, p. 282.

<sup>19</sup> We shall deal with the Castelfranco collection in the next edition of this publication.

<sup>20</sup> G. de Chirico, *Memorie*, op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>21</sup> Depictions with horses increased during the Florentine years; perhaps – as Mario Bellini suggests – the painting by Marco Pino, acquired by Bellini.

paintings depicting the young horse trainer with a red garment and white loin-cloth, an image recaptured also in the sculptures of the 1940s (figs. 3 and 9). Many works that passed through the premises of the Bellini antique dealers may have – if not influenced – undoubtedly interested de Chirico, in what can be considered a small private museum.

In the Bellini household, de Chirico saw, amongst others, the painting by Marco Pino depicting *Selene and Endimione* (Selene and Endymion), purchased in 1932<sup>21</sup>. De Chirico's activity as a sculptor was favoured by the Bellinis, who put several collaborators, such as Alietti, at his disposal. In 1940, the Maestro published his text on sculpture, *Brevis pro plastica oratio*, in «Aria d'Italia»<sup>22</sup>. Amongst these very interesting pages, de Chirico considers the sculptor to be “the creator *par excellence*”.

Several early terracotta sculptures<sup>23</sup> by de Chirico can still be seen at the Bellini house: *Cavallo e cavaliere con berretto frigio* (Horse and rider with Phrygian cap) (fig. 9), *Cavallo e palafreniere* (Horse and groom) (fig. 3), *Gli Archeologi* (The Archaeologists) (fig. 10). *The Archaeologists* (fig. 11) and *Ettore e Andromaca* (Hector and Andromache) (fig. 12) in bronze can also be found there. In a postcard sent to Luigi Bellini in 1940 (fig. 13), the artist informs his friend that he was sending him a “pencil drawing and a sketch for Alietti”, and in a letter de Chirico expressed his desire to take sculpture lessons from Alietti and to make “some larger sculptures with the model”<sup>24</sup>. The conversation with Mario Bellini was useful in reconstructing the way in which the sculptures were realised: at his headquarters on Lungarno Soderini, Luigi Bellini had a group of restorers who helped him in the antique business and, among these, the very skilled Alietti – no one ever remembers his first name – who dealt above all with sculptures. For his first terracotta works, de Chirico prepared the sketches for Alietti, with whom he collaborated during the work's execution. In 1941 Luigi Bellini, together with his artist friend, organised a sculpture exhibition at the Barbaroux Gallery in Milan<sup>25</sup>, at the same time as the exhibition of paintings from the Castelfranco collection at the Il Milione Gallery in the same city. The unpublished work entitled *Giorgio de Chirico pendant la guerre*<sup>26</sup> was hand-written by de Chirico in French, in a flat and regular hand, on three large lined pages, and signed “Luigi

in 1932 and depicting *Selene ed Endimione* (cf. A. Zezza, *Marco Pino, l'opera completa*, Electa, Napoli 2003, p. 39), with the scene of two horses on the right of the painting, characterised by rapid and varied brush strokes, may have influenced many images painted by de Chirico during his stay in Florence.

<sup>22</sup> *Brevis pro plastica oratio*. The text was re-proposed in G. de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, op. cit., pp. 381-382. In his writing, de Chirico took sides against the superficiality of certain contemporary painters, explaining that it depended on the fact that (the paintings and sculptures) “were not drawn out; were not the result of an excavation, were not sought within the notepad or in that piece of canvas, but were superimposed, tacked on”. He continued by writing that it is a mistake to think that sculpture is a hard and cold form and in fact, he said, “If a sculpture is hard, it is not sculpture. Sculpture must be soft and warm; and will have not only all the [types of] softness of painting, but also all the colours: a beautiful sculpture is always pictorial”.

<sup>23</sup> The sculptures *Cavallo e cavaliere con berretto frigio* (Horse and Rider with Phrygian cap), *Cavallo e palafreniere* (Horse and groom), *Gli archeologi* (The Archaeologists), in bronze and terracotta, *Ettore e Andromaca* (Hector and Andromache), were recently (2003) on display at the *Il Grande metafisico. Giorgio de Chirico sculptor* exhibition in Cremona, op. cit.: cf. the relative catalogue for the writings edited by this author (pp. 87-88-89-94-95-96-97). The terracottas can be dated to around 1940, but in any case before 1941. They were, in fact, exhibited at the Barbaroux Gallery in Milan, and their photos were published in the newspapers of the time (R. Carrieri, in *Il Tempo*, Rome, 6<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> March 1941). See also G. dalla Chiesa, *De Chirico scultore*, Milan, Mondadori, 1988.

<sup>24</sup> See, the postcard of 30<sup>th</sup> April 1940 sent by Giorgio de Chirico, from Florence, to Luigi Bellini and his wife in Montecatini. “Dear Bellini, Thanks for the postcard, I hope to meet you next Monday: tomorrow I shall give Gerardi the pencil portrait and sketch for Alietti. Many cordial greetings and best wishes from us two to both of you. G. de Chirico” See also the letter of 21<sup>st</sup> May 1941 from de Chirico to Luigi Bellini in which the artist asks Bellini to tell Alietti that he is counting “on his lessons”: cf. Appendix 4.

<sup>25</sup> Article by Emilio Radius in the *«Corriere della Sera»* of 9<sup>th</sup> March 1941. See also (in the Appendix) the letter of 21<sup>st</sup> May 1941 from de Chirico to Bellini, in which the artist says he has sold two sculptures.

<sup>26</sup> cf. Appendix 1.

Bellini". It could possibly be a "double self-portrait", as is the case of *Commedia dell'arte moderna* where one comes across Giorgio de Chirico and Giorgio de Chirico as Isabella Far<sup>27</sup>. The *Giorgio de Chirico pendant la guerre* text (published in this volume in the *Unpublished writings by Giorgio de Chirico* chapter), drafted by de Chirico as Luigi Bellini, was written in the presence of the antique dealer, as his son Mario recalls and refers to. What makes an impression in this text is the vivid recollection of the tragedy of the war in Milan, where the artist lived in Via Gesù and from where he had fled with Isabella, along with numerous rolled-up paintings, to then take up residence in the Bellini household. During the massive American bombardments of 1942, the city was on fire, and in the text there is a powerful description<sup>28</sup> of those dramatic moments. The feeling of terror caused by the war is overcome, if possible, by that of a hatred for the German forces who, at the conclusion of the tale, invade Florence. De Chirico had decided to move into a lovely villa at San Domenico, at the foot of Fiesole hill, but was not able to do so because the city was occupied by the SS, a species of ghosts "qui n'avaient rien d'humain". In his memoirs, de Chirico would recapture this tragic moment for Florence: it was 25<sup>th</sup> July 1943, and he was with Isabella in the living room whilst listening to the radio before supper time when he heard the announcement of the fall of fascism. At first, de Chirico considered this to be good news, but "Isabella who, not only on questions of art and thought, but in every other question, had truly excellent insight and intuition", calmed his enthusiasm and pointed out to him that "with the Allies still far away and with most of Italy full of Germans, loaded with arms and spite, for the Italians it could be transformed from one moment to the next into an exceedingly tragic situation"<sup>29</sup>. The text on the war concludes with Giorgio's return to Rome after having left several canvases, including a self-portrait (fig. 14), and completed sculptures at Bellini's house during the war, as well as several drawings (fig. 15). In the last sentence, de Chirico/Bellini confirmed de Chirico's "sacrosanct horror of the Germans": the invaders are "le peuple le plus sadique et le plus hystérique du monde". As we have seen, de Chirico's paintings containing images of the woods, linked to his stays at the villa in Impruneta during the war years, and depicting children and horses, date to these Florentine stays. Another Florentine character well-known to the artist immediately prior to the war re-emerges from Mario Bellini's recollections of those years. This was Ezio Marsi, a painter who – as the antique dealer explained – "did the filling-in", helping de Chirico above all with several re-workings of the *Piazze d'Italia* (Italian Piazza Squares). In fact, "Giorgio de Chirico designed the canvas according to his own precise idea, gave the indications for the colours, and finally Marsi completed the work". There are also traces of de Chirico's ties with the Bellini family in the Primo Conti archives at Fiesole. Primo Conti had painted a portrait of Mario Bellini's wife, Dodina, a portrait that de Chirico saw in the antique dealer's house. With regard to this, De Chirico

<sup>27</sup> Isabella Far - Giorgio de Chirico: to examine the subject in depth, see Jole de Sanna, *Forma dell'opera*, pp. 257-258, in *Giorgio de Chirico e Isabella Far, Commedia dell'arte moderna*, artists' writings number 22, Abscondita, Milan, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> cf. Appendix A.1. The text is recaptured less strongly in *Memorie della mia vita*, op. cit., pp. 188-189.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>30</sup> G. de Chirico: letter to Primo Conti of 16<sup>th</sup> May 1947, Fiesole, Primo Conti Foundation archives. The artist wrote: "I have also seen at Bellini's house the portrait of his wife, which I find very well-done, both as a painting and in its form. You should perhaps have worked a bit more on the hands, especially on the left one." Mario Bellini himself recalls having stopped Primo Conti while he was painting the hands, since he did not like the way in which the artist insisted on finishing them in his paintings.

wrote to the painter, telling him that he had seen the work and adding that he liked it but found that the hands were not sufficiently well-executed<sup>30</sup>. Other information on the Florentine period was obtained from the archives: de Chirico was also interested in exhibiting in Florence, and in a letter of 28<sup>th</sup> February 1941<sup>31</sup> in answer to Primo Conti, he indicated an interest in exhibiting together with him the following May, and clarifies that the pictures displayed “must only be the ones chosen and sent by me to Florence, namely, all paintings belonging to me”.

De Chirico also spoke of this exhibition to Bellini in a letter of 1941<sup>32</sup>, but he certainly considered Milan to be the best place for doing business. Indeed, again in his note to Primo Conti of 28<sup>th</sup> February 1941, he declared himself satisfied with his one-man show in Milan in the autumn and added, “moreover, the selling of modern painting in Milan is now thriving. There have been many exhibitions this winter. I would advise you to decide once and for all to leave Florence and come and live in Milan. For painting it is the liveliest city in Italy”<sup>33</sup>. In the Primo Conti archives are conserved the invitations to the exhibitions held by Giorgio de Chirico and Primo Conti together in 1941 and 1943<sup>34</sup>.

The late 1940s were the years of de Chirico’s polemic against the “ill-fated spirit of modernism”. A photo shows Luigi Bellini and Giorgio de Chirico in Venice, in front of a painting on an easel precisely during the period of the controversy with the Venice Biennial Exhibition<sup>35</sup>.

In the years 1946-1947, Luigi Bellini organised various de Chirico exhibitions in the United States. On the back of the exhibition catalogue at the Acquavella Gallery in New York, the artist stated, on 29<sup>th</sup> October 1946, that he had received three hundred thousand Lire for the paintings, as a result of a contract dated 12<sup>th</sup> October 1946 drawn up with Giuseppe Bellini (Figs. 16 and 17)<sup>36</sup>. Other American exhibitions had Giuseppe Bellini as intermediary, as can be inferred from the purchase receipts for the paintings<sup>37</sup>. In 1947 Luigi Bellini published the first edition of *Nel mondo degli antiquari*<sup>38</sup>. Many of the artist’s illustrations that accompanied the edition seemed to recall the pavilion façade of the small building re-designed by Coppedè, in which he had been a guest several times (figs. 18 and 19). De Chirico was interested in Luigi’s book, and asked him for news of its publication<sup>39</sup>. He added that he would like to write a critique of the book. In the volume, Giorgio de Chirico made a small drawing on many of the

<sup>31</sup> Fiesole, Primo Conti Foundation, Primo Conti archives, letter of 28<sup>th</sup> February 1941 from G. de Chirico to Primo Conti. All documents pertinent to Primo Conti and Giorgio de Chirico mentioned here can be found in the file: Fondazione Primo Conti, de Chirico G. n° 44, sc. XV, WS 24/ CAM A-B.

<sup>32</sup> Letter of 21<sup>st</sup> May 1941 from G. de Chirico to Bellini. Cf. Appendix A.4.

<sup>33</sup> Fiesole, Primo Conti archives.

<sup>34</sup> In the archives are also conserved the invitations to the joint exhibitions held by Giorgio de Chirico and Primo Conti at the Firenze Art Gallery. From 17<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> May 1941, twenty-seven works by de Chirico and twenty-nine by Primo Conti were on display. Another brochure for the de Chirico-Conti exhibition at the Firenze Art Gallery (Via Cavour, 14) is dated 14<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> February 1943. De Chirico exhibited 31 paintings, from *Lucrezia* of 1920 up to the more recent works of 1943.

<sup>35</sup> Fiesole, Primo Conti archives. Letter of 7<sup>th</sup> January 1950 from de Chirico to Primo Conti.

<sup>36</sup> Giuseppe, Mario’s brother, was also sent abroad to study at a very young age, but in America. There, he married a very lovely model who had opened up to the family an important contact with the *milieus* of American cinema and fashion. The exhibition at the Acquavella Gallery in New York (38 East 57<sup>th</sup> Street) was held in March 1947, and the works on display are listed in the Appendix 11. Next to each one in the catalogue conserved at the Bellini Gallery are indicated the prices and the year of execution: cf. Appendix 11.

<sup>37</sup> Amongst the documents in the Bellini archives can also be found the article by Clement Greenberg, who wrote a critique of the exhibition at the Acquavella Gallery (*Art in The Nation*, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1947, pp. 340-342), published here on p. 492-494. Numerous other critiques regard the American tour in which Bellini exhibited the works of the artist: from 5<sup>th</sup> August to 7<sup>th</sup> September 1947 at the Milwaukee Art Institute, in October 1947 at the Detroit Institute of Art, from 15 November to 15<sup>th</sup> December at Beloit College, from 5<sup>th</sup> January to 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1948 at the Philbrook Art Center, in February 1948 at the Oklahoma Art Center, and in March 1948 at the Wichita Art Association.

<sup>38</sup> The book by Luigi Bellini *Nel mondo degli antiquari* (In The World of Antique Dealers) was published in Florence by Arnaud in 1947. The second edition was published in 1950 in Florence by Del Turco.

<sup>39</sup> cf. Appendices 6, 7 and 12.

pages that recaptured themes of the period. In the first pages, we find the *Dioscuri on the beach* (figs. 20 and 21), which refer to the two paintings – today their location is unknown – depicting *the young Mario Bellini next to two horses* (fig. 22). In these paintings, perhaps a memento of *Ippolito e il suo cavallo* (Hippolytus and his horse), Mario is depicted standing, with a large cloth behind him; in the other, the young man is bending down to take a drink from the fountain next to his horse (fig. 23). The same images can also be found in the two terracotta sculptures that are still in the Bellini household (figs. 3 and 9) and in the group of the Luigia Sbragi collection<sup>40</sup>.

In an unpublished autobiography found at Bellini's house, mention is in fact made of these myths, which were rediscovered roughly during the Florence years. On page 41 of the book, *Nel mondo degli antiquari con disegni di Giorgio de Chirico* by Luigi Bellini, de Chirico painted a thorough portrait of the antique dealer while, armed with a gun, he fired at a wardrobe in order to fake the damage produced by a wood-worm (fig. 24). Once again, the *Dioscuri* on page 78 depict the same images as the paintings (fig. 25). On page 109, he sketches a scene which he himself had experienced: the visit to a farmer who believed he had a treasure in his house (a bust by Verrocchio), conserved in a closet inside an empty room closed with a grating (fig. 26).

Mario Bellini recalls that this interesting autobiography is a self-introduction<sup>41</sup> dictated by the artist to Luigi's secretary. In this text, de Chirico makes some important considerations regarding his artistic formation, the influence of the German philosophers, and above all mentions for the first time the influence of Albert Einstein regarding "the concepts of space, time, and the simultaneity of events". This autobiography is unpublished, and in order of time is de Chirico's fifth piece of writing. The preceding ones, in fact, are<sup>42</sup>: the biography for «Valori plastici», the one for Léonce Rosenberg, the one signed Angelo Bardi (but actually by Giorgio de Chirico) for «Selection», and lastly that of Scheiwiller.

In this interesting autobiography, which is published here as an Appendix, together with its English translation – since it probably served as a presentation for the numerous exhibitions organised by the Bellini family in America – de Chirico makes precise references to texts by critics, almost synthesising the thought of Soby and others, and clarifying important concepts on the difference between Metaphysics and Surrealism. De Chirico spoke of the Florence years in *Memorie della mia vita*<sup>43</sup>, and seemed to recapture the page written in French where he recalled his flight from Milan under bombardment. In the passage, de Chirico makes mention of the one-man show given in Florence and of his acquaintance with the Bueno brothers and Pietro Annigoni. He considered Florence, for painting, "a much more serious and moral environment than Rome". It was in fact at the antique dealer's house that de Chirico, together with Saverio Bueno, Mario Bellini, Luigi Bellini, Primo Conti and Pietro Annigoni, signed an ideal agreement to unite art with crafts, constituting the C.E.A. society. De Chirico designed the cover for the catalogue. The signatures of all these artists can be read in the document, which is kept in the Bellini family

<sup>40</sup> Luigia Sbragi was married in 1949, and received as a gift from the Bellini family the sculpture depicting *Hippolytus astride a horse*, of the group series that was conserved at Bellini's house.

<sup>41</sup> Self-introduction: cfr. Appendix 24.

<sup>42</sup> For the preceding autobiographies, cf. the volume by de Chirico, *Il meccanismo del pensiero*, edited by M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, op. cit., pp. 74-76, and by G. Roos the article *La vie de Giorgio de Chirico. Un'autobiografia di Angelo Bardi del 1929* published in «ON OttoNovecento. Rivista di storia dell'arte», Naples, 1996, pp. 22-33.

<sup>43</sup> G. de Chirico, *Memorie*, op. cit., pp. 188-189. In particular, on p. 185, de Chirico makes reference to being acquainted with the Bueno brothers and Annigoni around 1942.

house<sup>44</sup>. Of this activity, for which de Chirico made numerous designs for table cloths, table-mat sets, vases and glasses, there remains – in the collection of Giuseppe (Mario's brother) Bellini's heirs – a hand-blown Murano glass vase commissioned by Venini to a design by Giorgio de Chirico (figs. 27a, 27b), a plate (figs. 28a, 28b) and a paper-weight (fig. 29). After being produced, the objects were found to be very expensive and were never sold.

*Due cavalli accanto ad un frammento di colonna* (Two Horses next to a Broken Column)<sup>45</sup> was also de Chirico's idea for the lovely brooch set in white and yellow gold with rubies (fig. 30) which was Mario Bellini's wedding present to his wife Dodina, in 1946. Dodina frequently wore this beloved jewel which Mario Bellini had had Ettore Mancini<sup>46</sup>, a very gifted jeweller (who had worked for Cartier for a long time), create to de Chirico's design. De Chirico was a witness at the wedding, and on that occasion portrayed the *Bride and groom* enclosed in an oval that Mario still conserves in his bedroom (fig. 31). Mario recalls de Chirico as a great draughtsman: even at the table, he always had a sketch pad with him in which he drew continuously. In 1946, de Chirico involved Bellini in his dispute over the Allard forged paintings. Thus, in a letter from Rome dated 19<sup>th</sup> July 1946<sup>47</sup>, he recognised that the exhibition – to be precise, the exhibition in the Allard Gallery – held in Paris “with loud bangs on a big bass drum”, was made up of forged paintings. In the same letter he asked for help from his friend in exposing the profitable activity.

Documents in the Bellini archives can also give us a close-up review of De Chirico's controversy with the 1948 (Venice) Biennial Exhibition. Here, in fact, there is a postcard bearing the postmark of 4<sup>th</sup> June 1948<sup>48</sup> in which de Chirico wrote: “In Venice they wanted to play a dirty trick on me with the usual metaphysical train, but I am now suing the Biennial [...] G. de Chirico”. It was the moment in which, at the 1948 Biennial Exhibition, de Chirico resumed his violent quarrel against those who looked solely at his metaphysical period<sup>49</sup>. Relations between Giorgio de Chirico and his brother Alberto Savinio have always been difficult to analyse, but in a pleasant letter sent to Luigi Bellini on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1952<sup>50</sup>, in which the artist speaks about his brother's death – “the death of my brother has left a void in me, something difficult to define. Apart from the moral grief, it is like a reinforcement, indeed the absolute conviction, of a sort of *Leitmotiv* that I have always felt about life: *that everything in this life is futile*” – we feel the drama of the inner void left by the loss of the “Dioscuro” in the heart of the surviving brother. Of the same year – we are in 1952, the year of *Don Chisciotte* (Don Quixote) – de Chirico left the charcoal drawing depicting Don Quixote (fig. 32) at Luigi's house. The death of Luigi in 1957 brusquely concluded the long association between de Chirico and the Bellini family.

*Translated by Carolyn Cotchett*

<sup>44</sup> cf. Appendix 5.

<sup>45</sup> The brooch, which depicts “a fragment of a column and two horses”, is similar to the illustrations published in Luigi Bellini's book *Memorie di un antiquario*. A second brooch with the same theme was mounted in white and yellow gold and emeralds.

<sup>46</sup> This person was also important for the history of the family, since he became the companion, until death parted them, of Mario Bellini's aunt, Luigi's sister. The couple always lived in the Bellini's villa in Impruneta.

<sup>47</sup> cf. Appendix 7.

<sup>48</sup> cf. Appendix 15.

<sup>49</sup> Fiesole, Primo Conti Archives, letters of 1948.

<sup>50</sup> cf. Appendix 23.